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ABSTRACT

Group and individual informal reading inventories have brought about considerable improvement over standardized reading tests in the placement of students at their proper reading levels. Parents and school administrators want more individualization, however, so a comparatively effective, but quicker, test is needed. A combination of "cloze" sentences and a basic sight vocabulary list was used to construct just such a test. Exact readability levels were established for each grade level, and the sentence length and number of higher grade level words were also carefully controlled for each selection. Correlation with a graded informal reading inventory was quite high, while comparison with several well-known oral reading placement tests points up the test's usefulness in effecting a more careful placement of the pupils at a level where they can function in independent comprehension work; and the testing of 20 to 25 students consumes about one and one-half hours, compared with 10 to 20 hours normally required in testing a class. (Author/RB)

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USING THE CLOZE AND SIGHT VOCABULARY TO DEVELOP A GROUP INFORMAL READING INVENTORY

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Group and individual informal reading inventories have brought about considerable improvement over standardized reading tests in the placement of students on their proper instructional reading levels. However these tests still ask the teacher to invest an inordinate amount of time in the testing process. But the parents and school administration want more and more individualization so a comparably effective, but quicker, test is needed.

A combination of "cloze" sentences and a basic sight vocabulary list was use to construct just such a test. Exact readability levels were established for each grade level and the sentence length and number of higher grade level words were also carefully controlled for each selection.

Correlation with a graded informal reading inventory was quite high, while comparison with several well-known oral reading placement tests points up its usefulness as a more careful placement of the pupil at a level where he can function in independent comprehension work. And, the key factor, testing of 20 to 25 students consumes about one and one-half hours compared with 10-20 hours normally required in testing a class.

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USING THE CLOZE AND SIGHT VOCABULARY TO DEVELOP A GROUP INFORMAL READING INVENTORY

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Today's teacher more than ever is concerned about "teaching them where they can learn." But, this sensitivity to the individual pales in the face of a class load of 'thirty pupils' whose parents 'all' want a more personalized education for their children. The initial need, then, is for a quick, simple, effective group informal reading inventory to use in properly placing her pupils for reading instruction.

The standardized paragraph reading test was used for many years in placing pupils in the proper book. It soon became evident, however, that the placements were too high and many pupils could not read at the levels where the tests indicated they should be able to read (Sipay, 1969). One solution to the problem, which also served to help unmask the overplacement tendency of the standardized paragraph reading test, came in the formulation of the informal reading inventory by Betts (1946). The obvious difficulty with the individually administered version of the informal inventory was, and is, the large amount of time required to test the entire class. The group informal inventory was then introduced but still required individual reading of the oral selection - as in the individually administered version a time consuming exercise. Timewise, the teacher was left with an almost impossible task-to get all her pupils properly placed by reading level.

Primarily as a result of investigations by Bormuth (1967), the "cloze" procedure has come into wider use as a mean to place pupils in books which they can 'read.' The major problem with this test is that it indicates only

whether the pupil can or cannot successfully read the section of the book on which he's being tested. The test does not measure the pupil's ability to read at a specific level. And, in addition, normative data is currently not available to support its use in evaluating pupils reading below fourth grade level.

The Wisconsin Research and Development Center developed a group testing technique using flashed Dolch basic signt words which the pupil was required to "try out" in sentences with blanks in them. If the fit made sense the pupil then marked a circle by the word "Yes." This response technique was aimed primarily at evaluating mastery of the Dolch Basic Sight Vocabulary and did not serve as a satisfactory instructional reading level placement test. The "Yes-No" response technique invited a higher than satisfactory level of guessing, leading to many correct responses when in fact the pupil couldn't "read" the sentence and target word. Based on the recent Harris-Jacobsen (1972) analysis of the first introduction of the basic sight words in a large percentage of current basal readers, a significant percentage of the target words were much higher in first basal introduction than they appeared on the Wisconsin list. Twenty-five percent of the preprimer list and 33% of the primer list are actually introduced at a higher level in most modern basals. Also, the second and third grade list don't contain any words not already introduced for the first time at a lower grade level. The basic sight word list and the sentences used were not conceived as having potential for finding the instructional reading level. Instead, the principal thrust of this test was in its serviceability as a measure of basic sight vocabulary mastery.

Development of the Test

A combination of the sight word flashing technique used in the Wisconsin testing and "cloze" sentences with an exact readability, and including visual,

phonological, morphological, and syntactical foils, has potential as a "new," fast way to establish the class members' instructional reading levels. This test also offers a possible means to uncover basic linguistic errors native to the class group. The most frequently used sight words on the A and P List, (Otto and Chester, 1972), and the Harris-Jacobsen List (1972) were used as the source of the target words based on their grade-level appearance on the Harris-Jacobsen List. A list of 10 target words was randomly selected from each grade level list and for each target word a target sentence and two foiling sentences were constructed. Readability levels were taken on all sentences - a total of 30 - at each grade level so each selection had a readability score consistent with the grade level placement used by textbook publishers to define the reading levels in basal reader series.

Each selection was carefully graded for sentence length and number of new words. Sentences at the preprimer level averaged four words in length and each reading level thereafter length was increased by an average of two words per sentence. At the first grade level all words were on the Stone Revision of the Dale List of 769 Easy Words that is used with the Spache Readability Formula (1968). Beginning at the second grade level four new words were added, and for each book level thereafter the number of words not on the Stone or Dale List of Three-Thousand Words doubled from four, to eight, to 16, etc.

The test was constructed so that the target word was flashed to the class for two seconds. While holding the perceptual form of the word in mind the pupil then read the three possible answers sentences, selected the correct one, and "clozed" the sentence by writing the word in the blank. Those pupils who achieved the criterion of 70% correct, or better, continued on to the next higher reading level. Failures proceeded downward until the success

criterion was achieved. As pupils failed they were given some work tasks while testing continued for the others.

After the initial testing, which consumes approximately 25 minutes, the testing of each succeeding level takes an average of 12 minutes. Total testing-scoring time for 20-25 pupils runs between one hour and ten and one hour and thirty minutes. Once the initial analysis for reading level is completed other analyses can be made for perceptual errors, linguistic errors, and mastery of basic sight vocabulary. By returning to the level at which a pupil missed two or more sight words for the first time sight word mastery can now be analysed. The remaining core words, at the appropriate grade level, can be presented, ten at a time. In this way a complete analysis of the sight-meaning vocabulary of the class can be compiled.

Testing Implementation

The group vocabulary-comprehension test and an individual informal reading inventory were administered to 45 second and third grade pupils with the result that 36 of the 45 pupils had identical instructional reading level scores on both tests.

A close look at Table I reveals that only one case in nine was scored two book levels higher by the Aaron VoCom than the individual informal reading inventory placed the pupil. In the cases of the seven placements by the Aaron VoCom lower than the Informal Reading Inventory teachers were asked to verify these by the pupils' book placements in her reading class. In <u>all</u> cases the placements were as the Aaron VoCom Test indicated. Regardless, the problem here is overplacement. If the pupil <u>is</u> placed too low the classroom teacher can quickly spot this and move the pupil up. But a too high placement can be an emotional and public relations disaster that is not easily undone.

(See Table 1)

TABLE I

IRI Placement		Aaron Vocab. - Comp. Placement	
PP	12	PP	12
PP	0	PP	0
P	3	P	2
1	0	1	0
2^1	0	2^1	1
PP	0	PP	2
P	0	P	0
1	5	1	3
PP	0	PP	0
P	0	P	0
1	0	1	0
2^1	13	2^1	12
2^2	0	2^2	1
PP	0	PP	0
P	0	P	0
1	0	1	0
2^1	0	2^1	1
2^2	1	2^2	0
PP	0	PP	0
P	0	P	0
1	0	1	0
2^1	0	2^1	0
2^2	0	2^2	0
3^1	1	3^1	1
PP	0	PP	0
P	0	P	0
1	0	1	0
2^1	0	2^1	1
2^2	0	2^2	1
3^1	0	3^1	2
3^2	0	3^2	0
4	10	4	6

(1) Agreement - 36 of 45
(2) Disagree by 1 book level - 2
(3) Disagree by 2 book levels - 5
(4) Disagree by 3 or more book levels - 2

*No. disagreements in which Aaron VC scored below IRI 7

**No. disagreements in which Aaron VC scored above IRI 2

A comparison of the group vocabulary-comprehension test with the Silvaroli Reading Inventory, the Slosson Oral Reading Test, and the Schonnell Reading Test, all considered oral reading tests of instructional reading level, demonstrates the need for more accurate pupil placement (see table 2). In a majority of the cases these test scored the pupils as reading significantly above the levels indicated by the group vocabulary-comprehension test. This is consistent with the findings of research indicating that tests of oral reading skill alone do tend to inflate the reading performance scores of many pupils. The pupils tested were from grades two through six and were defined by classroom experience as pupils in need of special reading help.

All three test consistently scored a large number of the pupils considerably higher than the Aaron Vocabulary-Comprehension Test, with both the Slosson and the Silvaroli placing a significant percentage of their cases at a higher level. The breakdown of reading placement by book levels is the most telling figure, and one of key importance to the classroom teacher. The Silvaroli test placed four of the ten rated as higher than the Aaron VoCom two books or more higher, while none rated as lower was more than one book lower. This same pattern holds true for the Slosson - seven of fourteen two or more books higher and only one rated lower was two or more books lower. In the case of the Schonnell three of the six rated higher were two or more books lower. Taken together, the three individual, primarily word-calling devices scored 52% of the pupils two or more reading levels above the levels established by the Aaron VoCom. On the other hand, only 14% of the pupils tested with the three devices scored two or more years below the reading levels established for them by the Aaron VoCom.

An analysis of the Silvaroli, Slosson, and Schonnell scores further spotlights the problem of overplacement. The average of the Silvaroli scores that were above the Aaron VoCom placement was one year, while for those below it was

four months approximately one book level and not a very significant difference. In the case of the Slosson one pupil was dramatically lower (from high second down to preprimer). Eliminate this case and the two Slosson scores remaining are lower than the Aaron VoCom by only one book. Fifty percent of the pupils who were placed higher by the Slosson and the Schonnell were indicated to be functioning a good year ahead of their proper reading level, due primarly to the emphasis on word-calling as the index of instructional reading level.

TABLE II

	Aaron VoCom	Silvaroli	Sort	Schonnell
1.	2.3	3.3	2.3	2.8
2.	1.3	1.3	1.3	
3.	2.8	2.3	1.3	
4.	1.3	1.3	1.3	
5.	3.8	5.3	3.8	3.3
6.	3.8	7.3	3.3	
7.	2.8	3.3	3.3	2.8
8.	3.8	4.3	4.8	
9.	3.8	5.3	3.3	
10.	2.8	3.3	3.3	
11.	3.8	4.3	3.8	3.3
12.	3.8	3.3	4.8	3.3
13.	3.8	3.3	4.8	3.3
14.	2.3	2.3	3.3	
15.	3.8	4.3	3.8	2.8
16.	1.5	1.5	1.5	2.3
17.	1.5	1.3	1.5	
18.	1.8	1.8	2.8	
19.	2.3	2.3	3.3	
20.	3.8	4.3	4.8	3.3
21.	1.3	1.3	1.8	1.8
22.	2.3	1.8	2.8	2.8
23.	2.3	1.8	2.8	
24.	2.3	2.3	2.8	2.8
25.	1.3	1.3	1.5	
26.	1.3	1.3	1.3	

Silvaroli

6 lower than Aaron VoCom - Test lower average .4 months lower
10 higher than Aaron VoCom - Test higher average 1.0 years higher
10 equal to Aaron VoCom

1 book higher - 6
2 books higher - 1
3+ books higher - 3

1 book lower - 6
2 books lower - 0
3+ books lower - 0

Slosson

3 lower than Aaron VoCom - Test lower average .8 months lower
14 higher than Aaron VoCom - Tests higher average .7 months higher
9 equal to Aaron VoCom

1 book higher - 7	1 book lower - 2
2 books higher - 7	2 books lower - 0
3 books higher - 0	3 books lower - 1

Schonnell

6 lower than Aaron VoCom - Tests lower average .6 months lower
6 higher than Aaron VoCom - Test higher average .6 months higher
1 equal to Aaron-VoCom

1 book higher - 3	1 book lower - 5
2 books higher - 3	2 books lower - 1
3+ books higher - 0	3+ books lower - 0

Advantages of the Test Format

As individualization and independent work styles have gained wider classroom acceptance it has become more and more apparent that a reading placement test is needed that will more accurately estimate the ability of the pupil to function in worksheet and instructional situations requiring more stress on comprehension ability. This group test appears to more accurately place the pupil where his chances of succeeding at learning-by-worksheet are greater.

Two further advantages of the test are its usefulness as a measure of the pupil's ability to function in a pure oral reading situation and as a measure of linguistic difficulties pupils in the classroom are experiencing. Since the word-per-sentence count is carefully controlled for each level of the test it should be much simpler for the classroom teacher to use in testing the group in oral reading. The preprimer selection averages four words per sentence, and each book level thereafter increases by an average of two words per sentence. Thus, it is easier for the teacher to have each pupil read a sentence, and move rapidly around the group in this manner until all the pupils have read some 20-40 words. In this way no one pupil ties up the time for too long a period. Also, the teacher does not need to count out a passage since the word count is

already available. It is quite possible to stop in the middle of a testing and come back at any point in the selection without a loss of place or significant loss of pupil concentration, as might occur if the passages were a continuous story.

By using visual foils such as form and for with the target word from, it makes it easy to analyse some of the basic word confusions - as in the combinations was, saw, on, no and where, when, there - exhibited by pupils with these visual mislearnings. Phonologically, combinations such as four, for form, or, are and run, one are tested and are just a few of the problems pupils exhibit in making a proper sound-symbol fit. In the area of morphology, combinations such as it's, its, and jump, jumps, jumped may be utilized to help define the severity of the pupils' spoken language interference with their reading performance. If syntax is a concern of the teacher such tense change problems as demonstrated by do, did, done are a part of the test that is making a quick analysis of the role dialect is going to play in the class' reading errors.

Given its many possiblities this testing technique still stands primarily on its great value as a quick, accurate way to get the instructional reading levels of classrooms of children. For the classroom teacher, getting in one and one-half hours what is used to take 15-20 hours to get is called prógress!

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